ChessCafe.com

COLUMNISTS

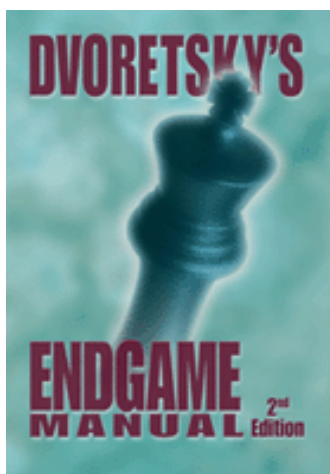## *The Instructor*
Mark Dvoretsky

Study Composing Tourney

My book of exercises, which I constantly use for lessons with my students, and as source material for my books and articles, contains over a thousand selected studies. I'd like to say a few words about my criteria for selecting studies – the system of preferences of somebody who is both a practical player and trainer. On the whole, since "there's no arguing with taste," my tastes are my own, and might well be different from those of other players and trainers, to say nothing of professional study composers. But they're still worth discussing – because now, I am inviting chess composers to take part in a tournament of composition, of "Studies for Practical Players," which I shall judge, together with the noted study composer Oleg Pervakov. And although Pervakov will undoubtedly not pass over any gifted composition that fails to fit exactly within the criteria laid down in this article – still, my opinion will probably have some influence on the process of awarding the prizes.
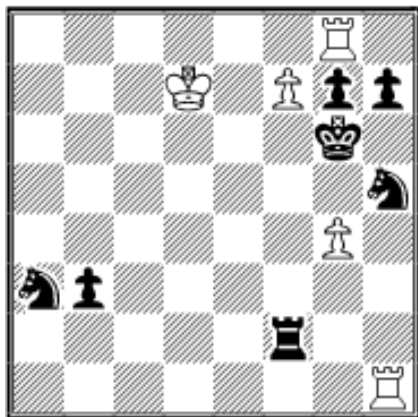
The total prize fund for the *Studies for Practical Players Tourney* is $1,500 (U.S.). The prize distribution is: 1st Prize – $500; 2nd Prize – $300; 3rd Prize – $200; 4th Prize – $100; 5th Prize – $50. There will also be Special Prizes totaling $350 and other prizes of my books in your choice of three languages – Russian, English or German. Send two copies of your original studies before August 1, 2007 to: Russia, 121471, Moscow, ul. Ryabinovaya, 4-63, Pervakov O.V., or via e-mail: oper60@inbox.ru. The results of the competition will be published on December 1, 2007.

"Restricted Genre"
Any chessplayer will get tremendous pleasure from short studies that contain a clear and unusual idea. Here are a few examples.

A. Votava, 1960
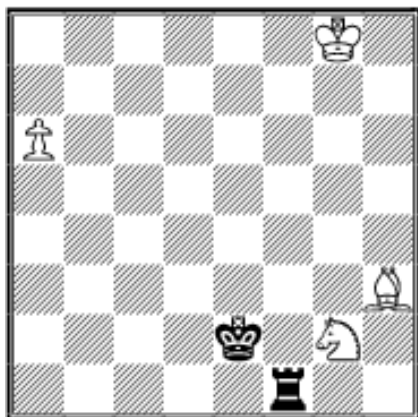
The first few moves are obvious.

1 f8Q! Rxf8 2 gh+ Kf7

But here, instead of the obvious 3 Rxf8+ Kxf8 4 Rf1+ Kg8 5 h6 (the endgame after 5 Ke7 h6 is drawish) 5...gh 6 Ke7, allowing Black to save himself by 6...h5! 7 Rg1+ Kh8 8 Kf7 h6, there comes an unbelievable quiet move, whose equal I cannot remember ever seeing.

3 Rh8!! Rxh8, and only now **4 Rf1+ Kg8 5 h6! gh 6 Ke7**, with mate to follow.
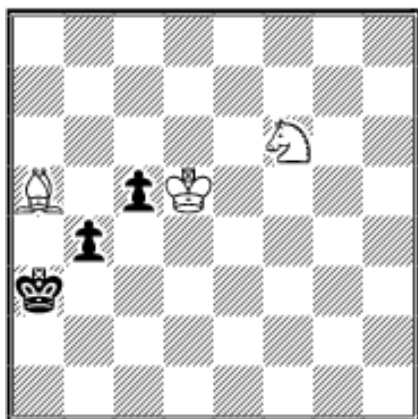
I. Schultz, 1941

White's not going to win by "normal" means, giving Black the time to attack the a-pawn with rook and king. For example: 1 Bc8 Kd3 2 Bb7 Ra1 3 Nf4+ Kc4, or 1 Bd7 Ra1 2 Bb5+ Kf3 3 Nh4+ Ke4, or 1 Nh4 Ra1 2 Bc8 Kd3 3 Nf5 Kc4.

The solution is a surprising knight sacrifice.

1 Nf4+!! Rxf4 2 Bd7!

What is so delightful here is not so much White's play, as the paradox of the resulting position The rook has two whole tempi to get to either the a-file or the 8th-rank; yet, on a wide-open board, he is unable to do so: all paths are closed: 2...Rf3 3 Bg4; 2...Rf1 Bb5+; 3...Rf6 3 a7 Ra6 4 Bb5+.

R. Réti, 1922

These kinds of studies are very useful for players, because they develop the all-important habit of paying extra-close attention to the opponent's ideas.

Stopping the pawns appears simple – in fact, it would appear that it can be done in many ways. For example: 1 Kc4 b3 2 Nd5 b2 3 Nc3. But here, White faces an unpleasant surprise: 3...b1Q!! 4 Nxb1+ Ka4, and retreating the bishop allows stalemate.

How about 1 Ne4 b3 2 Nc3, when 2...b2? loses to 3 Ke4!. Black, however, is rescued by 2...Kb2!, with 3...Kc2 to follow.

The only move-order to avoid all the clever traps laid by Black is: **1 Ke4!! b3 2 Nd5 b2** (2...Kb2 3 Kd3!) **3 Nc3 Kb3 4 Kd3**.

I'm not sure that studies similar to these could win a modern composition tourney; but in our tournament, they would probably win one of the special prizes.

Endgame Studies

In their day, many studies helped to develop the theory of endgames. Today, this is practically impossible – if what you have in mind is those areas of theory that would be of interest and use to practical players.
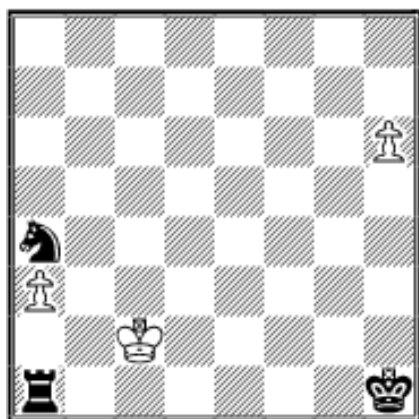
Let's suppose that research comes to a definite conclusion about the case where you have two minor pieces against a rook and a piece, or against three minor pieces – so what? I have never faced such a situation in all my years of playing, and neither have the vast majority of chessplayers. And even if it should arise once or twice in your lifetime, that's still no reason to immerse yourself in the theory – which is, no doubt, quite complex – after all, time is short, and there's much to be learned.

It would be apropos to mention here that it is this lack of practical benefit that leaves me largely uninterested in pawnless endgames, or let's say, studies based on various nuances of Troitzky's "two-knights-vs.-pawn" position.

But to show a player important aspects of contemporary endgame theory in a clear form, to help him get a better grasp on them – this is something study composers can still do today. And most often, the goal is achieved by paradoxical means: the unexpected exception to a well-known rule.

I received one of my strongest impressions of recent years from the following study:

H. Van der Heijden, 2001

As in the Votava study, the first few moves are obvious enough.
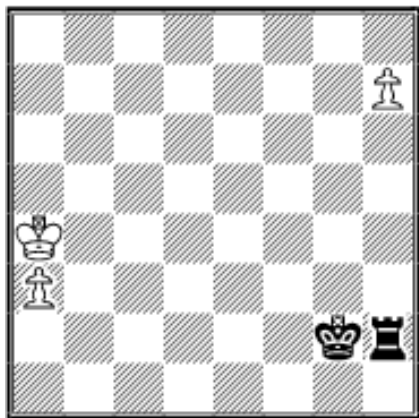
1 h7 Ra2+ 2 Kb3 Rh2 3 Kxa4 Kg2!

Composers are wont to make the play as lengthy as possible. In my notebook, I sometimes just throw out such introductions, and set only the critical position up for solving. Similarly, I remember that a famous study by the Sarychev brothers also had a few introductory moves; but nobody even remembers what they were anymore.

I have already laid out my discovery of Van der Heijden's study in some detail in

a previous [column](#). I repeat my discussion here, with minimal adjustments.

The first move is doubtless 4 Kb5. It's easy to see that 4...Rxh7? 5 a4 leads to a problem-free draw. The immediate king march to the queenside is far more dangerous.

4...Kf3 5 a4 Ke4 6 a5 Kd5, and 7 a6 loses to 7...Rb2+! 8 Ka5 (8 Ka4 Kc4!) 8...Kc5! 9 Ka4 Rh2 (9...Rb8 would be simpler still) 10 a7 Kb6!. And on 7 Kb6, Black wins by 7...Kc4! (an important endgame technique: "outflanking"!) 8 a6 Rh6+ 9 Ka5 Rxh7 10 Kb6 Rh6+ 11 Kb7 (11 Ka5 Kc5) 11...Kb5 12 a7 Rh7+ 13 Kb8 Kb6 14 a8N+ Kc6.

How can White's play be strengthened? Clearly, we must utilize the well-known endgame technique: "shoulder block." Instead of 6 a5, White can play 6 Kc5!?, and Black's king is deprived of the d5-square.
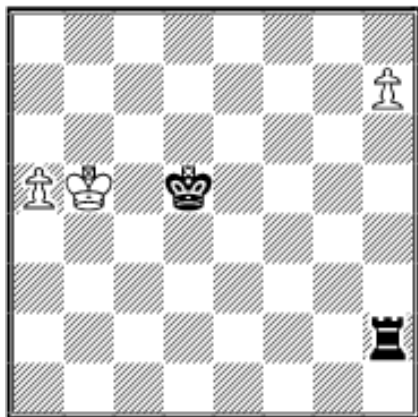
It's a tempting conclusion – but alas, it's refuted. Black replies 6...Rh5+! 7 Kb6 Kd5 8 a5 Kc4! (outflanked again) 9 a6 Rh6+ – a position we have seen already. Nor does 6 Kc6 Kd4 7 a5 Kc4 8 a6 Rh6+ 9 Kb7 Kb5 help White.

Well then, that means the starting position is a loss; for certainly we must have checked all the possibilities?

As it turns out, we have checked only the natural possibilities. We have acted in accordance with the usual rules in such positions: advance the king as quickly as possible, while shoulder-blocking the opposing king. As it happens, in this concrete situation, we have to ignore both those rules.

The key to this puzzle is the paradoxical conclusion, that with the kings at b5 and d5, the pawn at a5, and the rook at h2, the position is one of mutual zugzwang. And in order not to fall into zugzwang, White must lose a tempo at the very outset:

4 Kb4!! Kf3 (4...Rxh7 5 a4) **5 a4 Ke4 6 a5!** (under no circumstances the "shoulder block": 6 Kc5? Rh5+!) **6...Kd5 7 Kb5**

White to move loses as we have already seen: 8 a6 Rb2+! or 8 Kb6 Kc4!. But here, it's Black's move, and what can he do?

The a6-square is free, so he gets nothing out of **7...Rb2+ 8 Ka6 Rb8 9 Ka7 Rh8 10 Kb6!** (but here, the "shoulder block" is strictly necessary) **10...Kd6 11 a6 Rb8+ 12 Ka7 Kc7 13 h8Q Rxh8** – stalemate. This is the main line of the study.

If 7...Kd6, then 8 Kb6 (outflanking via c4 is no longer possible) 8...Kd7 9 Kb7 Kd8 10 a6 Rxh7+ 11 Kb8! Rh1 12 a7 Rb1+ 13 Ka8.

It's amazing that Black has no waiting move with the rook here: 7...Rh1 8 a6 Rb1+ 9 Ka5 Kc5?? fails to 10 h8Q, when the a1-square is covered. And the drawback to 7...Rh3 is revealed after 8 a6 Rb3+ 9 Ka4! (here Black doesn't have 9...Kc4) 9...Rb8 10 a7 Ra8 11 Kb5 Kd6 12 Kb6 Rh8 13 Kb7. And finally, 7...Rxh7 leads to a drawn resolution often encountered in practice: 8 a6 Kd6 9 Kb6 Rh1 10 Kb7! (but not 10 a7? Rb1+ 11 Ka6 Kc7 12 a8N+ Kc6 13 Ka7 Rb2, and the knight is lost) 10...Rb1+ 11 Kc8! (the "shoulder block") 11...Ra1 12 Kb7 Kd7 13 a7 Rb1+ 14 Ka8!.

The paradoxical nature of this position is certainly not in White's need to lose a tempo in order to avoid falling into zugzwang himself, while forcing Black into it – we have seen this endgame technique often enough. What's amazing is that zugzwang is even possible in an endgame with this type of material. I know of no other examples – this one stands alone. In rook vs. pawn endgames, it always boils down to just one question: who wins the race; who will achieve his goal first. Well, it's one more illustration of the saying: "never-say-never" (or perhaps, as in this case, "always") – there are no absolute maxims in chess!

Van der Heijden's study widens the chessplayer's horizon considerably, helping him remember several standard techniques for playing the "rook vs. pawns" endgame.
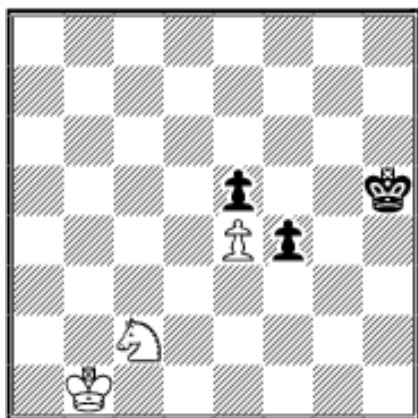
Here, we should touch on one delicate question. I am sure that this unique endgame position was discovered with the help of Thompson's famous computer database. Is this a "flaw," diminishing the composer's achievement?

Yes, the computer database is an instrument, available to anyone nowadays. Out of it, no doubt, we could probably extract yet more unique positions – there are some chess composers who do so regularly. The standard for evaluation here should be the result achieved. Thus: miracles, based upon complex computer analysis rather than on their content of sharp ideas, are probably of interest only to certain aesthetes.

Were Van der Heijden's position to arise in practical play, I'm sure that not even a world champion could find the way to safety. He wouldn't have given it a

thought – 4 Kb5? would have been played automatically. At the same time, the cold logic of the solution is something even a chessplayer of moderate qualifications would be quite capable of.
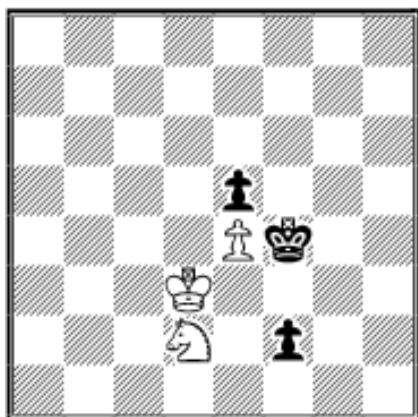
D. Blundell, 1995

Of course, the fantastic first move of this study, **1 Na1!!**, is its crown jewel. Instead of sending his king, or at least his knight, after the kingside pawns, White marches his piece in the diametrically opposite direction.

In my *Endgame Manual*, I laid out a series of conclusions that could lead one to this solution.

First, we examine White's most natural plan – approaching the pawns with his king.

1 Kc1? Kg4 2 Kd2 f3 3 Ne3+ (3 Ke3 f2! 4 Kxf2 Kf4) 3...Kf4 4 Kd3 f2 5 Nf1 Kf3 6 Nd2+ Kf4!

This is the mutual zugzwang position that forms the basis of this endgame. Black to move loses: 7...Kg3 8 Ke2. But it is White's move, and on 7 Ke2, there follows 7...f1Q+! 8 Kxf1 Ke3 9 Ke1 Kd3 10 Kd1 Ke3 11 Kc2 Kd4, with a draw.

Let's try 1 Na3? f3 2 Nc4. Now the natural 2...Kg4? loses: 3 Kc2 Kg3 4 Kc3! (zugzwang) 4...Kg4 (4...f2 5 Nd2 Kf4 6 Kd3; 4...Kf4 5 Kd3 f2 6 Nd2) 5 Nxe5+! Kf4 6 Kd4.

White succeeded only because, with the king at c3, the e5-pawn was taken with check. This can be avoided by playing 2...Kg5(h4)!! 3 Kc2 Kg4! 4 Kc3!? Kg3! (there's also 4...Kg5!?; for example, 5 Kd2!? f2 6 Ne3 Kf4 7 Kd3 Kg3! 8 Nf1+ Kf3! 9 Nd2+ Kf4). Now we have yet another mutual zugzwang position – this one with White to move. On 5 Nd2, there follows 5...Kf4 6 Kd3 f2 (the main zugzwang); the same thing happens after 5 Kd2 f2 6 Ke2 Kf4 7 Nd2 (7 Nd6 Kg3) 7...f1Q+!, or 5 Kd3 f2 6 Nd2 Kf4!.

By the way, the variation just examined leads us to an amazing conclusion: both sides must maneuver so as to avoid being the first one to approach. As soon as White plays either Nd2 or Kd3, he falls into zugzwang; and if Black plays f2 or Kf4 too soon, the zugzwang position occurs with him to move. So we are now dealing with "mined squares" (a concept we studied in the chapter devoted to pawn endgames in my *Manual*). However, this is the only example I know of in which there are squares that are mined for four pieces, instead of the usual two.

And now, for the solution. White has to act similarly to the last variation, but bring his knight, not to c4, but to b3, in order to leave the c4-square free for the king.

1 Na1!! f3 2 Nb3 Kg4 3 Kc2 Kg3 4 Kc3! Kg4 5 Kc4!

This is the point! Black can't wait any longer: on 5...Kg3 6 Kd5 f2 7 Nd2 Kf4 8 Nf1 decides. He must step on the mined square first, which of course leads to zugzwang.

5...Kf4 6 Kd3! (6 Kd5? Ke3; 6 Nd2? Ke3) **6...f2 7 Nd2** (zugzwang) **7...Kg3 8 Ke2** (8 Kc4 Kf4 9 Kd5? is a mistake, in view of 9...Ke3 10 Nf1+ Kf4) **8...Kg2 9 Nf1 Kg1 10 Ne3**.
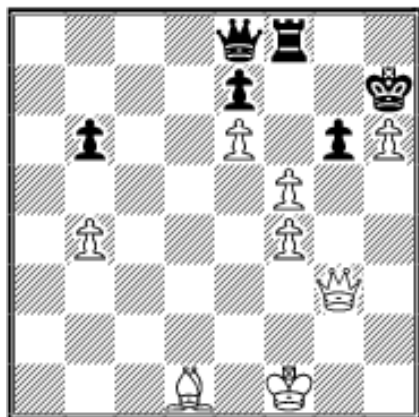
Blundell's study is pretty complex. Nevertheless, in my view, its complexity does not go beyond the capabilities of a strong player. Still, without its brilliant introduction, this study would probably have been received as something purely analytical, and would not have made such a strong impression.

In some articles and books devoted to composition, one may find the assertion that practical players "love" complex endgame analysis, and therefore analytical studies are aimed directly at them. Nothing of the sort! Excessive complexity or heaped-up analytical details only frighten people off, and to a great degree lessen the aesthetic impression of a study. Chessplayers find it interesting to solve studies similar to something they would be solving in a practical game, sometimes a little more complex, and desirably more beautiful.

A Difficult Choice
The difficulty in the examples we have looked at so far consisted in finding the unusual, well-hidden basic idea. Another type of study is no less important for the practical player: choosing the only correct continuation, when you have two or more tempting lines.

O. Pervakov, 1997

I will say straightaway that such a position is fun to solve, because everything in it is natural. Just as in a practical game, the white king is in the lower half of the board, with the black king in the upper; the pawn structure and material count are both absolutely normal. White has been attacking the castled king's position, sacrificed the exchange, and must now show that he can get more out of his attack than just equality.

On 1 Bc2? Kxh6 2 fg Kg7 3 Qc3+ Rf6, Black has the pawns securely blockaded, and the queen cannot break in – so chances would be roughly even.

But 1 fg+ Qxg6 (1...Kxh6 2 Qh4+ is clearly no good) 2 Bc2! looks tempting, even considering the possible counterstroke 2...Rxf4+! – after all, the rook need not be taken.

If this is really the only way forward, a practical player would choose it without immersing himself in calculation (let me repeat: there's no point in solving problems during training that we would not bother thinking about in a practical game). Nevertheless, before making our move, we should take a close look at the position, lest we overlook anything significant. This approach reveals one of the most important principles of calculating variations and coming to a decision: the "candidate-moves" principle.

We note the interesting tactical stroke 1 Ba4. The bishop is taboo, and yet Black has the defense 1...b5, and 2 Bxb5? is not possible, as now the bishop is taken with check. On the other hand, if we put the bishop back on c2 or play 2 fg+, we obtain familiar positions, but with Black's pawn on b5. For the moment, it's unclear whether the position of the queenside pawns has any significance – after all, the major events are going to develop on the opposite side of the board. Nevertheless, White has a choice, which means that we can't make that move yet: first, we must calculate the variations, keeping in mind that we can have this pawn on either of two squares, if we so desire.

1 Ba4!! b5 2 fg+ Qxg6!

2...Kxh6 is quite bad: 3 Qh4+ Kg7 4 Qh7+ Kf6 5 g7 Rg8 6 Bc2 Rxg7 7 Qf5 mate.

The variation 2...Kg8 3 g7! Rxf4+ 4 Qxf4 ba is more complicated. Here, the position of Black's pawn on b5 works against us, but it's not enough to refute 1 Ba4, since White still wins, though just barely: 5 Qf5! a3 6 h7+ Kxg7 7 Qf7+ Qxf7+ 8 ef.

2 Bc2! Rxf4+! 4 Kg1!

The only way to keep playing for the win: 4 Kg2?? Qxc2+; 4 Ke1? Re4+; 4 Qxf4? Qxc2 5 Qf7+ Kxh6.

4...Rf6! 5 Qg5!

White parries the threatened 5...Kxh6. If now 5...Kh8, then 6 Qxg6!.

5...Rxe6! 6 Kf1!

Time to get the king off the g-file, or else Black's rook will use the 6th-rank for continuous harrying of the bishop. Black can only defend against the threatened 7 Bxg6+ by pursuing the enemy king.

6...Rf6+ 7 Ke1 Re6+ 8 Kd1 (8 Kd2? Re2+!) **8...Rd6+ 9 Kc1! Rc6! 10 Qc5!!**

And here, as it turns out, is why White had to induce b6-b5 – so that he could occupy c5 with his queen! After 10...Kxh6 11 Bxg6 Rxc5+ 12 bc Kxg6 13 c6, White's pawn queens.

Not a simple calculation; still, one that should be quite feasible, considering the small number of side-variations diverting our attention from the main track.
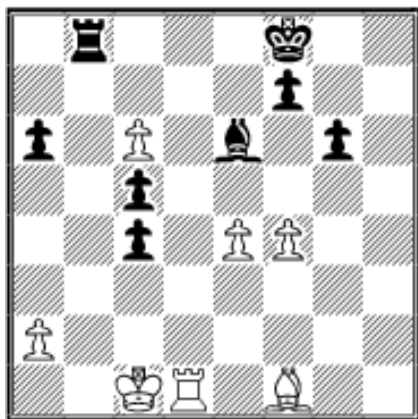
Playing Over Studies
Of what use to a trainer are studies in which it may be pointless (and sometimes impossible) to calculate the variations through to the end? By insisting on complete analysis, the trainer is in fact instilling in his student an irrational decision-making process that will inevitably result in fierce time-scrambles, which will in turn cost him valuable points.

Such studies should not be solved, but played through with limited thinking time. Let the student resolve the problems one after another as they arise, making White's moves one after another, and obtaining Black's replies from the trainer or a friend who knows the solution (or even the text of the book or article if necessary).

I have regularly employed this training method, and have had practical experience of its enormous effectiveness (to a great degree because of its close similarity to the realities of the tournament struggle). I will show you a few studies that are good for this kind of exercise.

V. Smyslov, 1938

Again, the naturalness of the starting position is pleasant to the eye. Clearly, White seeks the advantage here, pinning his hopes on the passed pawn at c6. But nothing comes of the straightforward 1 c7 Rc8 2 Rd8+ Ke7; nor does 1 Bxc4 Bxc4 2 c7 Re8 3 f5 (3 Rd8 Be6) 3...a5!? work.

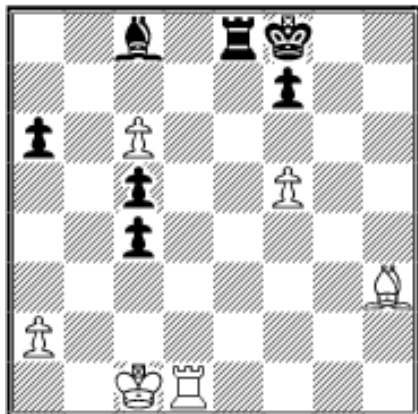After casting about for a bit, we find the only way to make things difficult for Black.

1 f5! gf 2 Bh3

Now, taking on e4 is impossible: White trades bishops, followed by c6-c7. Nor can he continue 2...Rc8 because of 3 ef. Not a bad result for White – for lack of anything better, he should continue thus, without making it harder for himself by further analysis.

2...Re8

Black prepares to retreat the bishop to c8. We establish that 3 c7? Bc8 4 Bxf5 Ke7! or 4 ef f6! gives White nothing, while the immediate capture on f5 retains more options that would be difficult for Black to face.

3 ef Bc8

Now's the time to stop and think. Once again, we see that after 4 c7? f6!, Black defends successfuly. But there are two gambit continuations, 4 f6!? and 4 Rd7!?, that require study. Here, accurate calculation is a must – either to find a sure refutation of one of them, while assuring ourselves that the other retains winning chances (the "exclusionary method," which helped us choose the first moves); or else, having selected the right continuation, to calculate it through to a win.

Smyslov did not examine 4 Rd7 in his commentary, although casting doubt on this move is no easy task.

4...Bd7? is hopeless: after 5 cd Rd8 6 f6 Kg8 7 Bf5!. Black's pieces are locked down on the 8th-rank, and White's king can advance unhindered.

4...Kg7? has an interesting refutation. White continues 6 c7! Re1+ (5...Bxd7 6 f6+ Kxf6 7 Bxd7) 6 Kd2 Rh1 7 Bg4! (7 Rd8? is a mistake: 7...c3+ 8 Kc2 Rh2+, and the king cannot go to the 3rd-rank; 7 f6+? also leads to a draw after 7...Kg6! 8 Bg4 Rh4 9 Rd8 Bxg4 10 Rg8+ Kxf6 11 Rxg4 Rh8 =) 7...Rg1 (7...Rh4 8 Rd8) 8 f6+! (8 Rd8!? would also be strong) 8...Kxf6 (8...Kg6 9 Rd8 Bxg4 10 Rg8+ Kxf6 11 Rxg4) 9 Rxf7+ Kxf7 10 Bxc8, and wins.

4...f6?! 5 Rc7 a5 6 a4 grants White a sizable advantage. This would probably not be a satisfactory conclusion for the composer, who requires a more definite assessment; but for the practical player, sometimes this is sufficient grounds for choosing a variation.

The only line to give Black a safe draw is 4...Re3! 5 Rc7 (5 f6? fails to 5...Ke8!) 5...Rxh3 6 Rxc8+ Ke7.

4 f6!! Bxh3 5 c7 a5

If 5...Bf5, then 6 Rd8 c3 7 Kd1 (or 7 a4 a5 8 Kd1) 7...a5 8 a4! c2+ 9 Kc1! c4 10 Kd2, when Black falls into zugzwang. This kind of zugzwang was White's basic goal in sacrificing the bishop. But there's still some work to be done in order to reach the zugzwang position with Black to move.

6 Rd8

White has to restrict the mobility of the enemy pieces: 6 Kb2? is a mistake, because of 6...Re2+ followed by 7...Kg8. And 6 a4? is also inaccurate: 6...Kg8 7 Rd8 Rf8 (or 7...Kf8) 8 Kc2 Bg4 9 Kc3 Be6, and it's White who falls into zugzwang.
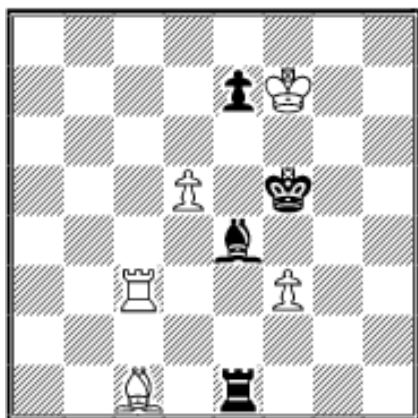
6...a4 7 Kb2!

Not 7 Kc2? a3.

7...Be6 (7...Bf5 8 Kc3 Be6 9 a3) **8 Kc2! Bf5+** (8...a3 9 Kc3) **9 Kc3 Be6 10 a3**

The zugzwang will cost Black his pawns, after which the invasion of White's king is decisive.
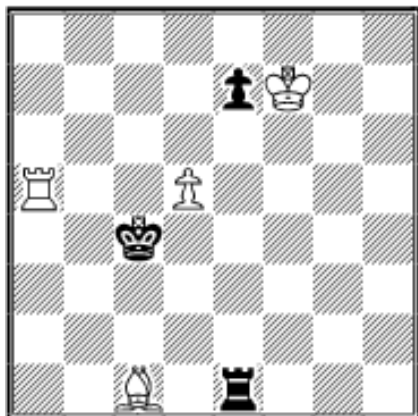
Y. Bazlov, 2003

This looks like a normal endgame. White will find it easy to win material, but will have a much harder time holding onto it. Already on the first move, he must make an important choice. White can win a piece, not only by just taking the bishop, but also by 1 Rc5, with its threat of 2 d6+. White can hardly expect to calculate the correct line to the end; it's more likely that one of the continuations can be refuted in the process of testing it.

Let's start by capturing the bishop.

1 fe+ Kxe4 2 Rc5 (2 Ke6 Kd4+ 3 Re3 Rxc1 is of no use to White) 2...Kd4 3 Ra5 Kc4 (of course not 3...Rxc1? 4 Kxe7)

White can ward off the threatened 4...Re5, either by 4 Bf4 or by 4 Bb2. But in either case, any attempt to make progress will cost White the d5-pawn – which means that it's a positional draw!
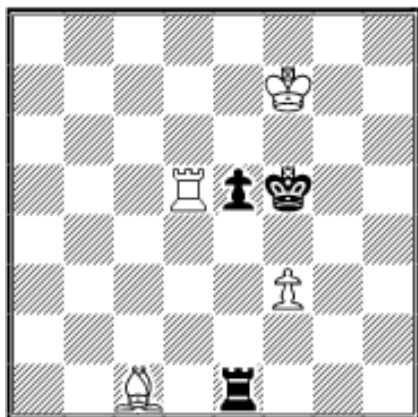
a) 4 Bb2 Re2 5 Bg7 Re1 6 Bf6!? Re2! 7 Bxe7 Re5.

b) 4 Bf4 Re4 5 Bc7 Re1 6 Bh2 Re2 7 Bg1 Re5 8 Rc5+ Kb4 9 Ke8 Re1 10 Bf2 Re2 11 Rc7 Re5.
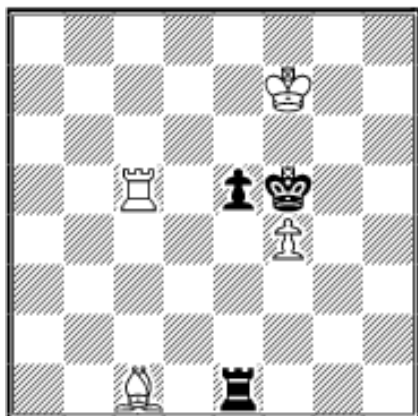
1 Rc5!! Bxd5+!

The only defense to the killing threat of 2 d6+.

2 Rxd5+ e5

3 Bd2!

3 Rc5?, which appears equivalent at first sight, allows Black to save himself by 3...Re3!! 4 f4 (4 Bxe3 is stalemate) 4...Re1, when White's in zugzwang.
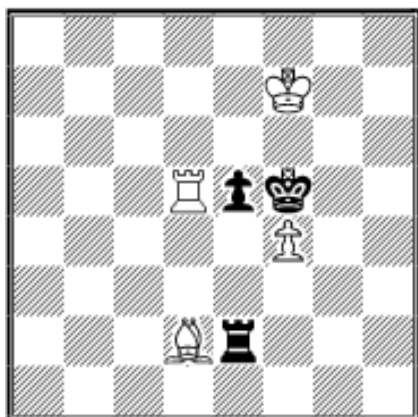
5 Ke7 Rxc1! 6 Rxc1 ef 7 Rf1 Ke5! leads to the mutual-zugzwang position known to us from the famous study by Richard Réti (1928) – Black's king "shoulder-blocks" the white king, preventing the latter from outflanking him and reaching the pawn: 8 Kf7 (8 Kd7 Ke4 9 Ke6 f3) 8...Kf5! 9 Kg7 Kg5!. And after 5 Bd2 Re2, White achieves nothing after either 6 Rd5 Rxd2! 7 Rxd2 ef 8 Rf2 (here, it's Black to move, but that doesn't mean anything, with the rook on f2 so close to the king) 8...Ke4 9 Kg6 f3 10 Kg5 Ke3, or 6 Ke7 Rxd2 7 fe Ra2! 8 e6+ Kg6. The position is drawn, since Black's rook controls the "long side," and stands ready to deliver flank checks.

The analysis of this variation was based upon several endgame ideas, none of them exceptional, but basic and important to every chessplayer. Thus, here we are training not only calculation, but also our retention of endgame theory.

Let's look at one more unsuccessful attempt: 3 Bh6?. Black replies 3...Ra1!: the rook occupies the "long side," allowing him to give numerous checks; it's a good thing to have in a rook endgame. After 4 f4 Ra7+ 5 Ke8 Ra8+ 6 Kd7 Ra7+ 7 Kd8 Ra8+ 8 Kc7, the simplest is 8...Kg6 9 fe Kxh6, although 8...Ra7+ 9 Kb6 Re7 10 Kc5 Re8 is possible, too.

3...Re3!! (3...Re2 4 Rd6 is just bad) **4 f4 Re2**

Threatening 5...Rxd2.

5 Bc1!

With the king at f7, 5 Ra5? fails to 5...Rxd2 6 fe Rd7+.

5...Re1 6 Rc5

Now we have reached the same position as after 3 Rc5?, but with Black to move, which

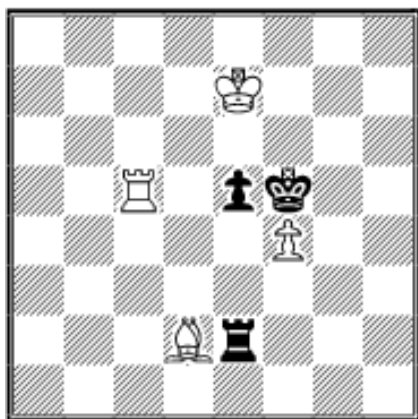means that he is the one to fall into zugzwang.

6...Re4

After 6...Rxc1 7 Rxc1 ef 8 Rf1, we have reached Réti's position with Black to move, and he has to give way before the white king: 8...Ke4 9 Kg6(f6) or 8...Kg4 9 Ke6(f6).

7 Ke7! Re1 8 Bd2!

8 Kd6? would be a mistake: 8...Rd1+ 9 Kc6 (9 Ke7 Rxc1! 10 Rxc1 ef 11 Rf1 Ke5!, reaching the Réti zugzwang position with White to move) 9...Re1 10 Bd2 (10 Kb5 Ke6) 10...Re2 11 Rd5 Ke6!.

8...Re2!

9 Ra5!!

Of course not 9 Rd5? Rxd2!=. The rook must take the a-file to prevent the enemy rook from reaching the long side (9 Rb5? Rxd2 10 fe Ra2! 11 e6+ Kg6, and draws).

9...Rxd2

9...Re4 10 Rd5 Re2 11 Kd6 is hopeless, too.
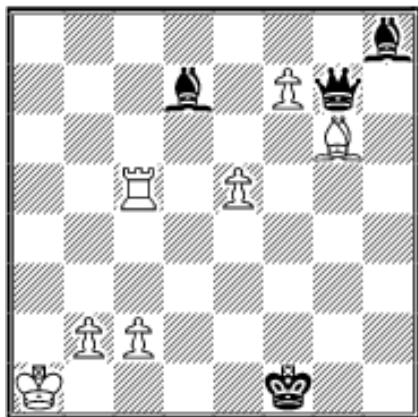
10 fe Rb2 11 e6+

On the b-file, Black's rook is not far enough away from the e-pawn (there must be at least three files between them for a flank attack to succeed), so White wins.

This study might be a bit too complex; three grandmasters have played White against me, and each of them erred on either the first or third move. But despite this, it has indisputable aesthetic and instructional value.

Both Sides Play

I have a very high regard for compositions in which both sides must spend many moves demonstrating uncommon resourcefulness and accuracy. Such studies may be offered to be played out between two players, with equal chances for both. Well, to be completely accurate: nearly equal, since if both sides play perfectly it is always White who achieves the goal. On the other hand, if the battle goes on long enough, with both sides having to resolve various tasks (at a tournament time-limit), then the chances become practically equal.

E. Somov-Nasimovich, 1939

In writing this article, I made use of van der Heijden's database of studies, and found three versions of this one. I had formerly known and used only one of them, in which the play was one move shorter (the starting position being the one we reach here after the first move).

It has already been mentioned that, when presenting studies for solving, it's sometimes a good idea for the trainer to throw out the introductory moves, if they don't add any ideas to the composition. Matters stand differently with studies to be played out: it can even be a good idea for the player to start out calculating some technical variations (as long as they're not overly complex) – it serves to disguise the moment when the combination needs to be set off.

1 Rc7!

1 Rd5? would lose to 1...Be6; for example, 2 Rd8 Bxf7 3 Bxf7 Qxe5!, or 2 Rd6 Bf7 3 Rf6+ Qxf6 4 ef Bxg6.

1...Be6!

Black has no real winning chances with 1...Qf8 2 Rxd7 Bxe5 3 Rd1+ Kf2 4 c3, or 3...Ke2 4 Bh5+ Ke3 5 c3. The strong pawn at f7 limits the activity of Black's pieces, preventing them from capitalizing on his material advantage.

The same assessment holds true after 1...Qh6 2 Rxd7 Bg7, when White has either 3 Bd3+ or 3 Rd6 Kf2 4 Be4, threatening 5 Rf6+.
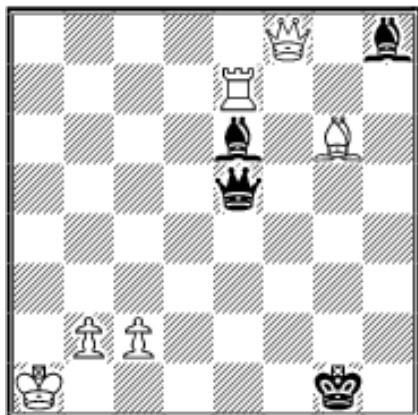
2 Re7

On 2 c3? Qh6, White loses the e5-pawn with a hopeless position: 3 Bb1 Bxe5 4 Re7 Bg7.

But now, the bishop is *en prise*; the normal response 2...Bd5 allows White to save himself by 3 Re8!. The problem is that after 3...Bxf7 4 Bxf7 Qxf7 5 Rxh8, the rook cannot be prevented from returning to the third rank (via a8 or h3), when White constructs the impenetrable fortress with rook and pawn on the second rank (one pawn is enough) versus queen, which has been known since the time of Philidor. Little is changed by 3...Ke2 4 b3! (of course not 4 f8Q?? Qa7+) 4...Bxf7 5 Bxf7 Qxf7 6 Rxh8 Qg7 7 Rh3 Qxe5+ 8 Kb1.

Thus, Black changes gears, from the attempt to exploit his advantage in material to a combinative attack against the enemy king.
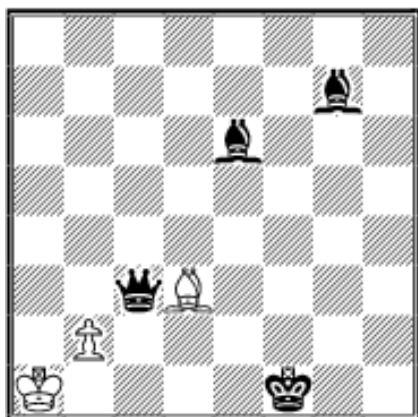
2...Qxe5! 3 f8Q+ Kg1!

It is on precisely this square that the king will find his best shelter from checks.

Black threatens mate, either at b2 or at e1 So White has no choice.

4 c3 Qe1+ 5 Bb1 Qxc3!

The queen is taboo, and it might seem that it's time for White to resign. But now come the sacrificial fireworks.

6 Rg7+!! Bxg7 7 Qf1+!! Kxf1 8 Bd3+!

Taking the bishop is stalemate, and otherwise White takes on c3. But this engrossing battle is not yet over.
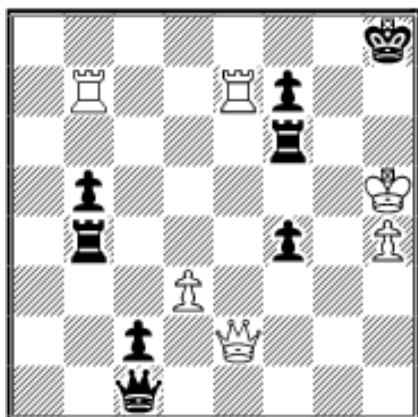
8...Ke1! 9 bc Kd2

The bishop is attacked, and Black also threatens 10...Kc1, forcing mate. White needs to make one more effort in order to break up this mating net.

10 Bc2! Kc1! (10...Kxc2 is stalemate) **11 Bb3!**, and taking the bishop is stalemate, while after 11...Bxc3+ 12 Ka2 the bishop is protected, and the game is drawn.
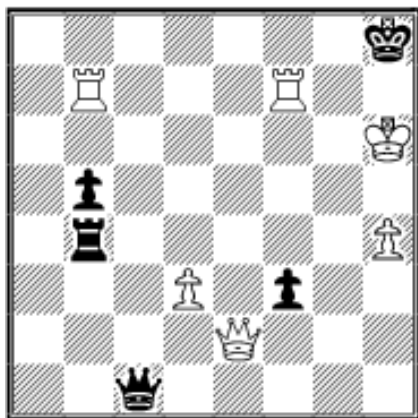
N. Rjabinin, 2003

1 Rxf7

It's easy to see that White has nothing better. 1 Qe5? lets Black mate: 1...Qd1+ 2 Kg5 Qg1+ 3 Kxf6 Qg6 mate. The desperate 1 Re8+? Kh7 2 Rh8+ Kxh8 3 Qe8+ is pointless, because the checks end almost at once: 3...Kg7 4 Rxf7+ Rxf7 5 Qe5+ Kh7. But now, Black must find a combination. Well, let him play his sacrifice, and we shall try to find the weak spot in his plan.

1...Rh6+! 2 Kxh6 f3+ 3 Kh5 Qh6+!!

Black can't get off with just one more rook: 3...Rxh4+? 4 Kxh4 Qh6+ 5 Kg4, and he loses. But why does he give up his queen (to be exact: not a queen, but his powerful passed pawn at c2)?
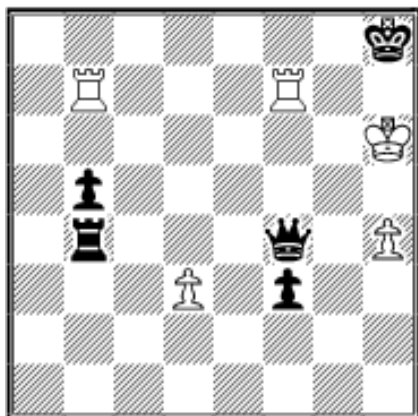
4 Kxh6 c1Q+

The whole point is that, after 4 Kh5?, the queen obtains a new checking possibility: 5...Qc5+ 6 Kg6 Rg4+ (here the rook protects the king against the 8th-rank mating threat) 7 Kf6 fe, and Black wins. We find the only defense: to deflect the enemy queen from the c-file.

5 Qd2!! Qxd2+ 6 Kh5

Now Black could give perpetual check by 6...Rxh4+ 7 Kxh4 Qh2+ 8 Kg4 Qg2+ 9 Kh4, but he has a right to try to win.

6...Qf4!

From here, the queen covers the b8- and f8-squares, on which White had intended to give checkmate.

It's easy to establish that the only chance of resistance lies in trading on f4, followed by Kg6. But note that the principle of identifying all candidate-moves, which we brought up while examining the Pervakov study, helps us find an additional resource: the pawn sacrifice d3-d4. Why we should give up this pawn is not yet clear – after all, on the next move, we'll still have to take the queen. But once we have a choice, that means we should not hurry with our move, but first calculate the variations accurately.

7 d4!! Rxd4

7...Qd6 is harmless: 8 Rbd7 Qxd7 9 Rxd7 Ra4 (to meet 10 Kg6 with a check along the 6th-rank) 10 Rf7.

8 Rxf4 Rxf4 9 Kg6 Kg8

If we protect the king by bringing the rook back to the 8th-rank, then White's rook can stop the f-pawn: 9...Rg4+ 10 Kh6! Rxh4+ 11 Kg6 Rg4+ 12 Kh6 f2 13 Rf7, and draws.

10 Rb8+ Rf8 11 Rb7!

Threatening perpetual check on g7 and h7. The only way to avoid the repetition is to sacrifice the rook.

11...Rf6+! 12 Kxf6 f2 13 Kg6! f1Q 14 Rb8+ Qf8 15 Rxf8+ Kxf8 16 Kf5 b4 17

Ke4 b3 18 Kd3

And this is why we sacrificed that pawn on move 7: to clear the d3-square for the white king, which would otherwise not have been able to stop the passed b-pawn.

TOP OF PAGE   HOME   COLUMNS   LINKS   ARCHIVES   ABOUT THE CHESS CAFE

[ChessCafe Home Page] [Book Review] [Columnists]
[Endgame Study] [Skittles Room] [Archives]
[Links] [Online Bookstore] [About ChessCafe] [Contact Us]